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CONNEMARA HOLY WELLS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

SIR,—Holy priests, holy monks, holy hermits, and holy nuns are not more numerous in these western regions than holy wells, and as these classes of persons are described to possess virtues, gifts, and miraculous powers, some to a much greater degree than others; so these holy places are some much more distinguished than others; but as it is with those, so it is with these—they are all holy, miracle-working, soul-saving, sanctifying places; and, though I can never meet with the person that has been an *eye-witness* to one of these mighty miracles said to be wrought at any of these holy wells—just as I cannot (perhaps 'tis neglect of me) meet with any of those persons that could say they ever *saw* a miracle wrought, or a cure performed by those holy persons named—yet I must believe, if not a heretic, that these things do take place, and it is great want of faith to think otherwise. Each of these holy wells seems to have belonged to some particular saint, and they still appear to belong to him. There is a very celebrated one of these in Errismore, called *Tobbar Caileen*, or little St. Charles's well, to which persons resort on different occasions to pay their vows; but as the 12th of November is dedicated in particular to this saint, great numbers assemble at this well on that day; some come upwards of 30 miles to be present on this occasion, as the presiding saint (might I say divinity) is then more than usually propitious. At an early hour, one might observe many a sail directing its course towards this spot, with crowds of young and old of both sexes collecting, mostly all barefooted, as they generally inflict this previous penance on themselves, as well as coming fasting. Many from the long journey, more from the long fasting (as they should partake of nothing the night before), and all from the consciousness of the load of guilt they bear upon their consciences, present a downcast, gloomy, sullen look, as they approach in awful silence to perform the solemn rites. The fiddler's arm seems to have lost its music, the piper's fingers their merry notes, the jovial jester wears a face of sadness, and the boastful bully doffs his haughty gait; but while these approach to pay their vows, and present their offerings, and obtain the pardon of all their sins, you might see others setting up their tents hard by, where refreshments galore may be obtained by all who are disposed to pay for them. In performing the station, each person commences by blessing himself, as it is called, "in the name of the Father, &c.," then says the Lord's prayer, and going round the well from east to west, walking or on the bare knees, repeats seven Ave-Marias, and on coming to the starting point, repeats the Apostles' Creed. This is repeated seven times, and then the worshipper sprinkles himself with the water in the well, and when this is done the station is performed; after which he retires to a tent for refreshment, and meeting with a friend or two, who may have got their penances over them, too, he usually joins them in drinking to the health of the blessed St. Caileen, and as the hour of 12 approaches, when all duly performed stations must have been ended, with clear consciences, light heart, and renewed spirits, to which parliament, potheen, ale, rum, cakes, fruit, &c., &c., have contributed no small share, they begin to chase away the gloom, and drive away the clouds that hung over them so heavily a few hours before, by singing songs, telling stories, and dancing Irish jigs and reels, hornpipes, &c., &c., to the music of the Irish bagpipes and the fiddle. Some make matches, others introduce affairs of this kind. While there may be two or three couples that actually go off together on these occasions, others take this opportunity of avenging former wrongs or insults, and hence you might see a half dozen here, a dozen or two there, thirty or forty yonder, some using the fist, others the sticks, and not a few hurling stones at the heads of their respective antagonists; so that bloody noses, cut heads, broken limbs, and bruised bodies are the result of these proceedings. But it is universally believed that Caileen's day would not be duly celebrated unless blood were copiously shed in his honour, and the tradition goes (it is one of the hitherto unwritten traditions of the holy Roman Catholic Church, till I have had the honour of penning it down) that he was *fond of the drop*, a pleasant jest, a merry tune, a funny song, a reel, jig, or hornpipe, either to the music of the bagpipes or fiddle, and that, as well as any *holy priest* of our own day, he was famous at wielding an oak or blackthorn cudgel. 'Tis said (another tradition) that miracles are yearly wrought at this well. There is a beautiful ruin of an old church, in a small island in the sea, about three miles west of this, which, tradition says, was built by St. Caileen in one night, being 50 feet long by 25 wide, and that he brought the stones from Arran, 8 or 9 leagues off, all in the same night. St. Caileen must have been a great enemy to both mice and worms, for the latter were never found in his well, nor the former in his island, unless some heretical eyes may have pretended to see them. But this is wholly contrary to the traditions of holy mother Church, which it must be great presumption to gainsay. About 3 leagues south-east of Caileen's shrine is another of St. M'Daragh, on a small island, about an Irish mile from the shore. There is another holy well here, but, not like Caileen's, this goes often dry. M'Daragh's day is the 16th of July, when hundreds of boats assemble there, each containing from 10 to 50 persons. If the weather be fine, the numbers are immense, coming from the County Clare,

Arran, Galway, and all along the coast from that round to Shirehead, or even Clifden, being a seaboard of between 90 and 140 miles. Persons come from Castlebar, Tuam, Cong, Headfort, Ross, Oughterard, MacCullen, &c., &c., on these occasions. The proceedings are *precisely the same* here as at St. Caileen's well, and any who may not be able to obtain a *passage* in to the island, go through the ceremony on the shore, directing their attention towards the well and small chapel, and they are always sure to have lots of refreshment at hand, when the devotions are performed, if the *needful* be only forthcoming. These great days of atoning for their sins are also taken advantage of to make their enemies, whom they may meet there, atone for offences or injuries done to each other. I might mention St. Kearan's, St. Anne's, St. Cummin's wells, as also many others, to each of which a particular day is set apart, where similar proceedings occur. St. M'Daragh is said to have built his church in one night also, and to have brought the stones from Arran, too, both for walls and roof, though the Arran stones are *limestone*, and M'Daragh's church is built of *granite*. Yet tradition obliges us to believe the saint did as it states, and we must rather think he transubstantiated them into granite, than doubt the truth of what the Church teaches. There are offerings of butter thrown into St. Kieran's well by some, in order that their cattle may be fruitful and return a good supply of butter the succeeding year; while others take away these offerings, believing it will increase *their* milk and butter—putting a halfpenny, or a *bad* penny, or even a button, or a small round stone, in place of the roll or rolls of butter taken out of the well. Though these are matters of yearly occurrence in Connemara, surely they are affairs of serious regret, and call aloud for the laws of a Christian nation to put an end to such heathenish customs. The superstitious rites of ancient Greece or Rome, or such as may be found in the darkest corner of India or China, could not be more vile or debasing than these, at which all sorts of illegal and immoral acts are perpetrated. It was returning from the annual station at St. Caileen's well in Errismore, which was held in last November, that a Roman Catholic priest was found dead on one of the mountains of Rasmuck. Does not this teach a sad and solemn lesson? Should it not be a solemn warning to all who call themselves the ministers of religion, not only to wholly abstain from celebrating these heathen orgies, but to cry aloud and spare not, to raise up their voice like a trumpet, and show these blinded people their *transgressions*, these wandering flocks their sins, to lead them from these broken cisterns to the living fountain open for sin and for uncleanness, whence alone healing waters flow?—I am, sir, yours faithfully,

A WORSHIPPER AT THE WELL OF WATER
THAT SPRINGETH UP UNTO EVERLASTING LIFE.

REQUIESCAT IN PACE—“MAY HE REST IN
PEACE.”

TO THE EDITOR OF THE CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

SIR,—Might I ask you, how are we to understand the above motto, which so generally adorns the tombstones of our Roman Catholic brethren?

Hitherto I had been delighted with this voice, that seemed to speak so refreshingly, amidst the sombre memorials of death, of that rest that remaineth for the people of God. I considered that Catholic and Protestant who had contended in their lives, yet in their death were not divided, and had already, in the presence of Christ, embraced each other with the kiss of everlasting peace, in realms where “the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.”

But when lately I examined more carefully this Catholic motto, and compared it more closely with the adjoining one of the Protestant—“He sleeps in Jesus”—I discovered a great and serious difference, which entirely dissipated my pleasing reflections. It was not said of the Catholic, as it was of the Protestant, *Requiescat*, or *Requievit*, “He rests, or has rested, in peace;” but, *Requiescat*, “let him rest,” a wish that “he may rest in peace.” I was startled; for this implied that my Roman Catholic brother was not yet at rest, though the date on the tombstone told of the lapse of many years. An appeal to the respective Bibles seemed only to establish this difference—for, while the Douay has in *Isaiah*, lvi. 2, “Let peace come, let him rest,” and in *Apoc.* xiv. 13, “that they may rest;” the Protestant Bible has, “He shall enter into peace, they shall rest,” and the *Burial Service*, “for they rest.” Can you, sir, explain this, or say why is the Roman Catholic in the case of death so unfortunate, so vastly inferior in consolation to his Protestant neighbour, that while the latter goes away comforted, by his text, that his friend is already with Christ, the Catholic mourner at the grave must ever have that sad and melancholy motto, telling that the departed loved one is not yet at peace. Is it true of the Catholic dead, “that they have rest neither day nor night?”—*Apoc.* xiv. 11. It must be at best but a cold consolation to remark that “the smoke of their torments shall not ascend up for ever and ever,” but only for a time, till satisfaction is made, and the offerings of the Church have delivered them. And yet I have observed “*Requiescat*,” the wish that he *may obtain*, remaining over the Catholic unchanged, till time has effaced it. Why not alter this gloomy word when the deliverance is effected, and then, joining hands with the Protestant, write, “He

is now at rest”—or, if that period cannot be exactly discovered, inscribe from the beginning, *Requiescat*, “He will rest in peace.”

Whilst meditating on these things, I thought of a solution of the difficulty, by referring the words to the bodies and not the souls of the dead. “My flesh also shall rest in hope.” *Ps. xv. 9. Acts*, ii. 26. It is a principle deeply seated in our nature to desire that our remains be left at peace, undisturbed in their quiet repose, that no one desecrate the temple of our bodies, or scatter our frail dust, till aroused by the trumpet of the resurrection morning—and the motto might be intended to urge posterity to the observance of this religious duty.

But, sir, unhappily for this conjecture, though the bodies of David and of our Lord were allowed to rest intact, yet the practice of the Church of Rome proves this is not the meaning they give these words. Is it not their custom to divide, distribute, remove, and translate from place to place the bodies of their saints and martyrs? In the Rev. A. Butler's *Lives of the Saints* for the month of June, vol. 6, mention is made of more than forty saints whose remains have been so treated. Must it not have been contemplating the fate of the saints, and dreading a similar one, that led a celebrated poet to write this version of the requiescat—

“Kind friend, for Jesu's sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here;
Bless'd be the man that spares these stones,
And curst be he that moves my bones.”

But since the Roman Catholic Church does not admit this translation of the motto, or its application to the body, my solution falls to the ground, and I must apply to you, sir, or some of your correspondents, for a satisfactory explanation that may administer comfort in connecting the motto with a Roman Catholic brother departed.

X. P.—P. S.—The application of the awful text (*Apoc. xiv. 2*) to Roman Catholics after death (except only in duration) is not mine, but Mr. Power's. See *CATHOLIC LAYMAN*, Vol. iii., p. 136.—X. P.

We sincerely thank our correspondent for the above letter.

The practice he refers to was not one of either the ancient Church of Rome or the Church of Ireland. If our readers will turn to our article on the Catacombs of Rome in our 4th vol., p. 73, they will find specimens of the ancient Christian inscriptions. “Domitianus sleeps in peace.” “Died in Christ Pompeianus—he sleeps in peace.” And for the ancient Irish Church, see same volume, p. 42. “Cormac, the official of Clonmacnoise, and a learned ecclesiastic in *Christo quievit*” (*Annals of Ulster*). The language of the ancient Church of the Catacombs and the Church of Ireland was the language of Protestants, not that of the modern Church of Rome, in this matter.

ON EARLY HAY-MAKING.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

SIR,—I observe that about Dublin, even so late as the last week of July, some people are only just beginning to cut their first crop of grass for hay. A friend of mine (and there are several others of the neighbouring gentry have been acting on the same plan, with like effect) has some 40 acres of grass land within ten miles of Dublin. For upwards of 20 years, his practice has been to cut the first crop of grass about the second week in June, so as to get it into great cocks by or near midsummer. The advantages of this plan have been so fully proved that those of your readers who have not tried the experiment cannot fail to be interested in the result. The crops of hay are usually very heavy in this neighbourhood, but whether heavy or light, the mowing always takes place while the grass is in flower. The results have been as follows on the one farm which I more particularly allude to, and I am informed that it is uniformly the case with the other farms which act on the same system:—1. The crop is rarely, if ever, spoiled by the rain. 2. The expense of making is generally much less, for though the grass in this sappy condition requires more time to “make” than if allowed to stand for seed (by which time the hay is in a great measure converted into straw), yet the weather in June is *usually much finer* than in July. 3. The after grass (upon the farm alluded to) is so far advanced by the end of July that, though there are no clovers or artificial grasses, a very good second crop would have been fit for the scythe by the middle of August, and the cattle that have just been turned in to graze are above their knees in grass. 4. The first crop, in consequence of the early mowing, has come on more and more early under this treatment, until it has reached its present condition of early maturity. It may be well to remark that every year the stock are removed at such time so as to give the utmost benefit to the spring growth. As we all know, it is the formation of the seed that principally exhausts all soils, and the vigour of the grass plant, which is ordinarily allowed to run to seed, is, by this plan of early mowing, thrown into the after grass, and has formed in these meadows a bottom such as I have never seen exceeded in density of growth, and depth of colour.

Yours, &c.,

RUSTICUS.

Dublin, July 31st, 1856.